

April 16, 2009



To: Village of Cedar Grove Board of Trustees

Gene Gentink
Mark Post
Ken Hoopman
Jeff Duenk
Ron Hinze
Chris Konzak

Town of Holland Board of Supervisors

Don Becker
Marty Elmer
Dave Huenink
Steve Jones
Stan Lammers

From: Cedar Grove Fire Department

Over the past few months, several members of the Cedar Grove Fire Department have attended multiple joint Village of Cedar Grove/Town of Holland board meetings. The objective of these meetings was for the respective municipalities to reach agreement on the CGFD contract. At each meeting we observed the board members discussing issues and getting hung up on various financial issues. Each time these issues were shelved and the decision was to discuss at a future meeting.

At the last public meeting on March 10, it appeared the boards were close to reaching agreement. But after some brief private discussions, things seemed to fall apart and an agreement was not reached.

Then, on April 14th a letter was submitted that proposed giving up on discussions and to dissolve the joint Fire Department.

The reactions of people on the Fire Department were shock, disbelief and anger. One person described this whole situation as "childish". The last one maybe sums this up the best. Have we lost sight of what is truly the goal here? How much money are we really talking about in the end? Is this whole uproar really worth that?

We understand your commitment to manage the financial resources of your respective constituents to the best of your abilities, however, you also have an obligation to provide them with the best services available. We, of the CGFD,

believe that we have been financially responsible to both communities as evidenced by the following:

1. Replaced all SCBA equipment and a new compressor at a cost of \$153,500. Cost to municipalities - \$7414.
2. Purchased Jaws equipment at a cost of \$50,000. Cost to municipalities - \$0.
3. Sanded, painted and installed shelving on trucks 89, 90, 94 & 95 with a minimum of 900 man hours @ \$25/hour = \$22,500. Cost to municipalities - \$0.
4. Acquired, rebuilt and refurbished portable generator and trailer, replacement cost \$9,000. Cost to municipalities - \$0.
5. Purchased portable life rescue boat and respective equipment at a cost of \$6,700. Cost to municipalities - \$0.

This partial list of projects completed and provided by the CGFD equals \$241,700. Total cost to municipalities - \$7414.

Once again, we believe we have been financially responsible to both communities and will leave it to your judgment as to the quality of services we provided.

It is our understanding that the issues causing the disagreement are both monetary and personal in nature. We submit to you that the level of service you are receiving and the monetary value provided by CGFD far outweigh whatever dollar amount you are haggling over. The cost of operating a department would be greatly increased if it was to be borne by only one municipality and the response time for adjacent departments to serve the area would increase the risk of life and property to unacceptable levels.

If the municipalities dissolve the joint department, the cost of running separate departments would far exceed what you have now, but that's not the biggest issue. The biggest issue is that neither municipality would have a fire dept. to protect their area. There are 4-6 members of the current department that live in the township. That's not quite enough to start a fire department. If the town depends on surrounding departments, the house will burn down, or the person will be dead by the time they get here. If the village board thinks that the village fire fighters are going to dedicate hundreds of hours into training for a handful of fires a year, you are grossly mistaken. Therefore the only people suffering here are the residents that live in our area.

After discussing this issue as a department, we decided there was also a personal story we'd like to share:

About a week ago we got dispatched to I-43 near Smies road for a roll-over. I happened to be on Sauk Trail near Smies so I went right

out to the scene. When I arrived I found a car mangled in the ditch. I found an adult male ejected, an adult female ejected and barely breathing, a male child still in the car crying with a broken leg and looking for his mommy, and an infant male, ejected, still sitting in his car seat and not breathing. After requesting additional resources I began working on the infant child. With limited supplies an EMT bystander and I began CPR on this infant. As our Rescue Squad arrived another member assisted. Then Oostburg Ambulance arrived and one of their members joined us. Then Orange Cross Paramedics arrived and they assisted us. We continued working on this infant for 10-15 minutes. We called St. Nicholas hospital to get medical control. They told us to do one more round of CPR and then call it. We did that round of CPR and then we stopped. If you could have seen the faces of those rescuers when they stopped CPR we wouldn't be fighting about this today.

But then the Orange Cross Paramedic saw the infant's chest move, so we all started again. It was like sweet music in the back of that ambulance, there was hope again. Then Flight for Life arrived and they worked on that child and got him ready for transport.

When we loaded that child into the helicopter we were no longer doing CPR, we didn't need to, he was breathing on his own. We got that child transported the one of the finest children's hospitals in the world. We gave that child a chance. With the decisions you guys are making, you could be taking that chance away from any future child. I happen to have a child about that same age and if a governing board decided to take away his chance, there would never be any forgiveness for any of you. You all have families, that little boy could be your child, or grandchild, or spouse. Are you willing to put a price tag on your own family because that is what you are doing?

In the past 7 years our department has had to pull 10 burned bodies out of cars, pull a father and his child out of a pond, pull 3 children out of a burned house, attempt to revive a motorcycle accident victim, and now do CPR on an infant and his mother. We've done the task and we've become better and stronger because of it. We've received formal letters from both boards thanking us for our service and facing adversity. These letters now feel like empty pieces of paper because now we see your true hearts. Feelings have been hurt, and I think we've all lost some respect for both boards.

You've let this become about a small amount of money, and more importantly not about the well being of the citizens you've been elected to serve. You've also let it become personal. When a former board member's name continues to come up

in meetings it is obvious you are holding grudges and are doing this for personal reasons.

Our department has been caught in the middle on this. We have no say in any of this. The only thing we can do is educate the citizens in our community that our respective boards have disregarded their own municipality's and families' safety to satisfy their own personal grudges. Our department has met and discussed our feelings on this matter, and we remain neutral and are not siding with either board. One thing is for sure, the members of our department will stick together through this.

What is the price tag for your family member? Is it more than the amount of money you are disagreeing about?

If the two municipalities cannot do their job and come to an agreement, then we believe it would be in the best interest of your constituents if you were to seek a third party mediator and both parties agree to binding arbitration.

We continue to remain dedicated to the preservation of life and property and we will continue to put ourselves in harm's way in an effort to protect the community.

Sincerely,

Members of the Cedar Grove Fire Department

Josh Aleff
Chris Bloomingdale
Nick Broetzmann
Tom Bruggink
Wayne Bruggink
Dale DeMaster
Ben Droppers
Rich Gillette
Al Holle
Ben Holle
Phil Holle
Jeff Kritz

Dan Kruschke
Todd Kruis
Rick Lewis
Mike Lubbert
Ben Lukens
Shawn Lukens
Ed Mandel
Mike Meeusen
Greg Navis
Mark Navis
Craig Otte
Jason Otte

Jason Risseeuw
Chris Rose
Jon Sass
Blake Schanen
Dale VanEss
Mark VanEss
Brian Voskuil
Kyle Voskuil
Andy Wieberdink
Ben Wieberdink
Nate Wieberdink